

cca news



New Beginnings

New Beginnings for the Earth

New Beginnings for Timor Lorosa'e

New Beginnings



Cover: 'Creation and Spirituality' by Hanna-Cheriyen Varghese (Malaysia)

*New beginnings:
we hope to bring
about new
perspectives,
new directions,
new
commitments
and new
enthusiasm*

The theme 'New Beginnings' captures a number of new things that we wish to highlight in this June 2002 issue of *CCA News*. It describes a new experience for CCA, having held a big and important meeting in Taiwan for the very first time. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan graciously and lovingly hosted our CCA General Committee meeting on 12–16 May. It was a generous act on the part of the PCT, an active member of CCA, along with other member churches and the NCCT, affirming the life and work of the regional ecumenical movement.

The meeting began with a colourful celebration of Asia Sunday on 12 May, which focused on 'Timor Lorosa'e: Hope for New Life'. It is a time of new beginnings for the people of the youngest nation in the world, as Timor Lorosa'e inaugurated its independence and its new president on 20 May. Participating in the Asia Sunday celebration were leaders and members of the churches of the National Council of Churches in Taiwan and the members of the CCA General Committee, who represented various churches and councils of churches throughout Asia. Many of our General Committee members stayed on to join Christians of Taiwan and guests from other countries in the second annual National Prayer Breakfast in Taiwan on 18 May. This was a time for solidarity with the people of Taiwan as they prayed for their leaders, their land and their people, for justice and peace of all creation, for reconciliation, harmony and unity as a people of faith, hope and love. As Rev. William Lo, PCT General Secretary, wrote of the event, the experience was like 'bringing the world to Taiwan'.

Our hope for new beginnings includes our continuing prayers for freedom and democracy to come about in Myanmar. We rejoice that after almost two years of house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi was freed on 6 May. We pray that all citizens of Myanmar can indeed participate freely in their country's political process towards national unity, peace and stability. Our hope for new beginnings is also expressed in our actions for peace, not only for the other conflict-torn countries of Asia but also of the Middle East and the rest of the world.

The groaning creation of God is also a prayer for new beginnings. We hope that the observance of Environment Sunday, 2 June, as well as the international meetings related to sustainable development will bring about new beginnings for more earth-friendly ways of living.

At the CCA level, we hope to bring about new perspectives, new directions, new commitments and new enthusiasm among our constituency. This is why we are calling the general secretaries of our member councils of churches for a meeting on 17–22 June. This is why we have set the theme 'New Ecumenism' for the 45th CCA anniversary and international symposium on 5–9 August in Hong Kong.

May we continue to seek the guidance and wisdom of our triune God so that we can continue to be passionate as well as humble in our work for peace with justice.

—Abn Jae Woong

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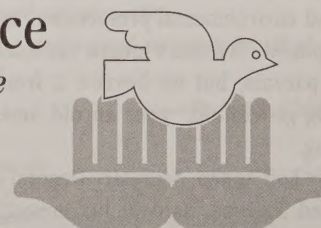
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Giving Earth a Chance

Becoming good stewards of all creation

The year 2002 marks the tenth anniversary of the 'Earth Summit', the World Summit on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. Actually it can be counted as thirty years after the first global conference on Human Environment held on 5–16 June 1972 in Stockholm. Since then the United Nations Organisation (UNO) has designated 5 June as World Environment Day to stimulate worldwide awareness and enhance political attention and action on global environmental preservation and development. 'We don't inherit the world for our parents, but we borrow it from our young generation,' goes an old American saying.

Dr Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said in his message on

World Environment Day 2001, 'All of us have to share the earth's fragile ecosystems and precious resources, and each of us has a role to play in preserving them. If we are to go on living together on this earth, we must all be responsible for it. Let us be good stewards of the earth we inherited.'¹

This year, leading to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), set for 26 August – 4 September in Johannesburg, South Africa, the UN has encouraged governments to undertake worldwide activities reaffirming their concern to safeguard the environment for future generations. The international theme for World Environment Day 2002 is 'Giving Earth a Chance'. It calls on everyone to contribute to healing the planet, assessing the progress towards the goal of sustainable development during the

past ten years, and developing a plan for the next decade.²

It is expected that about 65,000 heads of UN-member states, representatives of international organisations, business corporations, non-governmental organisations, community and people's organisations and various sectoral groups will take part in the World Summit.

Environmentalists around the world consider there have been setbacks in the global environmental situation, especially after the global economic slowdown since 1997 and President George W. Bush's government's withdrawal from signing the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. The Munich Reinsurance Company commented that natural disasters—earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, fires, floods, droughts, tropical storms, cy-



CCA Involvement in Environmental Concerns since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992

- 1992** Consultation on Environment and Development, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- 1995** Consultation on Church's Response to Environment in Asia, Jakarta, Indonesia.
- 1996** CCA-NCC Pakistan Joint National Workshop on Church and Environment, Lahore, Pakistan.
- 1996** Regional Workshop on Using Art to Communicate Environmental Issues, Manila, Philippines.
- 1997** CCA/WCC/ACISCA/NCCJ Joint Interreligious Consultation on Climate Change: A Challenge to Sustainable Development in Asia, Kyoto, Japan.
- 2001** CCA/KCCSD Joint Environmental Training, Seoul, Korea.

clones, landslides and others—appear to be becoming more frequent and will get worse in future unless aggressive action is taken.

Deforestation can, in the short term, lead to increased water run-off, hence soil erosion, mudslides and flash flooding. Poor forest management has exacerbated flooding, for example the flood in the Philippines that killed more than 5,000 people in 1991. The 1996 flooding of the Yangtze River in China killed more than 2,700 people, left two million homeless, drowned tens of thousands of animals, destroyed crops on over 20 million hectares of farmland, and caused economic losses of more than US\$20,000 million.

The world still remembers the major disasters in recent years—a cyclone in Gujarat, India, that killed more than 10,000 people (1998), hurricane George, which caused damage estimated at US\$10 million in the Caribbean (1998), and hurricane Mitch, which led to more than 9,000 deaths in Nicaragua and Honduras (1998).³

Today, natural environmental concern is closely linked to social, economic and political development agendas at local, national, regional and international levels. It is not a merely a natural/physical matter but has faith and ethical dimensions.

'The destruction of the global atmosphere is a sin against God. True forgiveness is available from God but only after true repentance by the sinner. True repentance requires a con-

version of the heart and a transformation of behaviour. Only then can true forgiveness be experienced.'⁴

It is precisely because of our Christian faith and ethics that the Christian Conference of Asia is concerned about destruction of the ecosystem. CCA calls for a change in human lifestyles, which include preserving and developing the environment. CCA, therefore, encourages member churches and councils to do the following:

- Promote environmental concerns in the mass media and networking among member churches.
- Collect and distribute Christian reading resources on the environment.
- Promote eco-theological studies in theological colleges/seminaries.
- Work with other environmental organisations and groups.
- Hold outdoor environmental activities so people can get in touch with nature.
- Observe Environmental Sunday in June

every year.⁵

Finally, it is for us to reaffirm that environmental development needs a comprehensive perspective, collective strategies and practical and sustainable approaches. In this regard, capability building, community organisation, empowerment and corporate partnership are important components in the process of environmental preservation and sustainability.

'Let us be good stewards of all of creation.'

—Prawate Kbid-arn

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Sustainable development: a farmer near Chiang Mai, Thailand, combines lemons and fish (YMCA)

God's Intervention

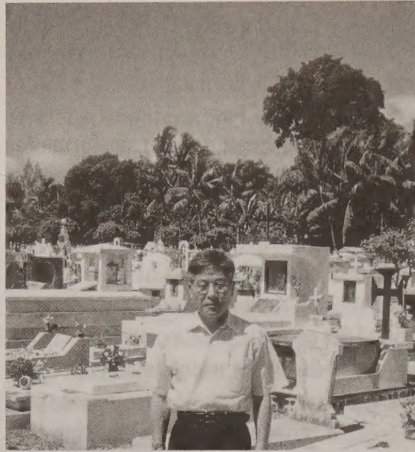
The Asia Sunday address delivered by CCA general secretary Dr Ahn Jae Woong, at the Chi-nan Presbyterian Church, Taipei, Taiwan, on 12 May 2002

We are delighted to be with you today to celebrate Asia Sunday. This is a special occasion to celebrate the independence and birth of a new country, Timor Lorosa'e, at the beginning of the new millennium. The theme of Asia Sunday is 'Timor Lorosa'e, Hope for New Life'. Tonight, Rev. Francisco de Vasconcelos, Moderator of the Protestant Church in East Timor, was to be with us to deliver the sermon. Unfortunately, due to an illness, malaria, he cannot be here. We received this information by email after arriving in Taipei. But he sends his special greetings to all of you tonight.

I would like to share with you tonight a biblical story based on John: 5:1-9, which speaks to us about God's intervention to heal and restore those who are sick. I am sure everybody knows this story. At the Bethzatha pool many sick persons were sitting around the porches near the pool, waiting for healing. Angels used to come to this pool and disturb the waters. The first person to jump into the water after the angels had disturbed the waters would be completely healed. Therefore, many sick people waited by the pool in order to get well. Jesus asked the sick person, who had been there for thirty-eight years, 'Do you want to get well?'

He replied, 'Sir, I don't have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up. While I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first.' Jesus said to him, 'Get up. Pick up your mat and walk.'

We read that immediately the man got well. He picked up his mat and started walking. This is a fascinating story. We see God's active intervention to bring about healing, fullness of life, restoration. 'Pick up your mat and walk', Jesus said to the person who had waited for thirty-eight years by the pool for healing. We are told that he was fully restored to new life.



Ahn Jae Woong at the in Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili

Time and time again, God disturbs the waters of despair, injustice and oppression to bring about new life and God enables people to pick up our mats and walk. A couple of days ago, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house confinement. Without international intervention, she would not have been released. In her book *Freedom from Fear*, Aung San Suu Kyi sought to persuade the Myanmar people to embrace four freedoms: freedom from fear of torture, freedom from fear of dying, freedom from fear of poverty and freedom from danger. Because of her commitment and convictions, she remained very strong in spite of immense military persecution. After international intervention, she won the Nobel Peace Prize. This gave great recognition of her sacrifices and the plight of the people of Burma. We see, in her release, God's intervention to bring about a new opportunity for the people of her country to build democracy, peace and freedom.

We see a similar story in the situation of Nelson Mandela, who was imprisoned for twenty-seven long years. Through the hard

work of the people of South Africa and international intervention, the white minority rule was disturbed, like the angels disturbing the waters by the pool of Bethzatha. Nelson Mandela too was eventually freed and elected president of South Africa in a landslide election. As a result he also won the Nobel Peace prize. There too, as South Africa rebuilds, we see the opportunity for new life that God's intervention in human history has made possible.

East Timor endured four centuries of Portuguese rule, then twenty-four years under Indonesian occupation, during which time the people of East Timor struggled valiantly for independence. There too the angels disturbed the waters and God intervened in the form of the massive build-up of international concern about the suffering of the East Timorese people. The referendum on independence took place in 1999 and there was a landslide vote for independence. Next week the people of Timor Lorosa'e are going to celebrate national independence and the inauguration of the new President of Timor Lorosa'e, Mr Xanana Gusmao, who also endured long years of suffering, leading the East Timorese people to independence. I am delighted that I have been invited to be a guest of honour on that occasion, to represent the Asian Protestant Christian community.

We know that whatever we do for our neighbours, we do for Jesus, as stated in Matthew 25. At this time, the people of Timor Lorosa'e are at the beginning of rebuilding their country from the destruction that followed the referendum, including the burning of almost all of the major buildings and infrastructure in Dili, the terrorising of the people of the country and the lasting scar of feelings of humiliation and inadequacy from long years of occupation and colonisation.

We are called on to give whatever assistance we can to these our sisters and brothers who are struggling to rebuild this country from the ashes. They have a strong foundation to build on, in their culture and traditions, but need our continued solidarity of all of us. Let us show our Christian love, concern and solidarity in doing all we can to work with the people of Timor Lorosa'e as they rebuild and create a new nation.

Whenever they ask us to assist, let us do it generously. Indeed, let us not wait to be asked, but actively seek opportunities for working together for peace and happiness in that new country. As our Asia Sunday theme says, 'hope for new life' lies at the heart of our Christian responsibility and the aspiration of the Timorese people.

During one of my conversations with Rev. Francisco de Vasconcelos, the Moderator of the Protestant Church in East Timor and a member of the General Committee of the CCA, I was very impressed at the spirit of true forgiveness and reconciliation he expressed. In spite of the exploitation and oppression, his determination to live with-

out bitterness, working together in a spirit of harmony and active cooperation with all peoples, including the people of Indonesia, was wonderful to see. I think this is the true spirit of Christian love. I wish he could be with us tonight, to directly communicate to you his sentiments and convictions, as a leader of the new country of Timor Lorosa'e.

Today many other countries are still like sick people, waiting for healing. We see the ghastly situation in Palestine and Israel, the continued division of North and South Korea, interreligious and communal conflict in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, conflicts between indigenous and non-indigenous people, gender injustices, racial and other forms of discrimination elsewhere in Asia and other forms of brokenness and oppression. These situations need God's intervention in order to heal these broken communities. They are waiting for healing, for new life, for restoration to full health.

We, the Christian community should play our part in disturbing the water of injustice, oppression, exploitation and suffering and in helping people to pick up their mats and walk. We must actively intervene, in the

name of our God, who brings healing and fullness of life to all people.

Through the Christian Conference of Asia and each of our member councils and churches, we would like to intervene, to disturb the water in order to heal divisions and conflicts. Without God's intervention, it is not possible for us to help in this way. But we believe that with God's help, we can disturb the waters of hatred and despair, to help bring new life to our communities. This year's Asia Sunday is a timely reminder for us to rely fully on God's intervention and God's promise to be faithful to all God's people. In this faith, we will continue work to heal communities and enhance fullness of life.

Just as a mustard seed, the smallest seed one can imagine, grows into a huge tree, providing a home for the birds, food and shade, may Timor Lorosa'e, a small territory, with a small population, rather like a mustard seed, grow into a beautiful tree which gives hope to people throughout the region. May God bless Timor Lorosa'e and all of us here tonight as we too work in obedience to God to disturb the waters.

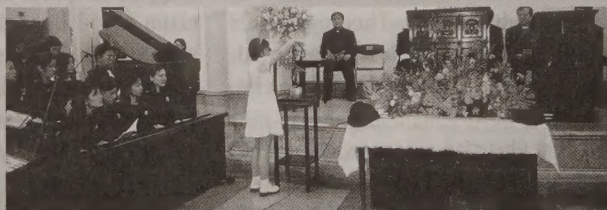
Asia Sunday in Taipei

On 12 May 2002 the General Committee of CCA joined the service held in the Chi-nan Presbyterian Church in Taipei, Taiwan, to celebrate Asia Sunday. The theme of this year's Asia Sunday was 'Timor Lorosa'e: Hope for New Life'.

They followed the same order of service used in churches throughout Asia, when prayers were given for the people and churches of Timor Lorosa'e, Asia's newest nation, for whom the future began just one week later.



Young people give expression to voices about the suffering of the people of Timor Lorosa'e in dramatic form



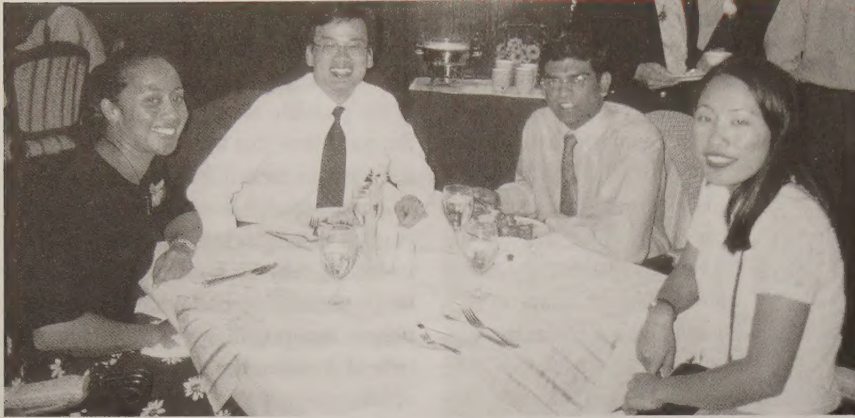
A child tends a young plant, the symbol of new life



Bells ring out for the new nation



The CCA in Taiwan



Youth representatives Lagi (Aotearoa—New Zealand), Victor (Hong Kong), Rakesh and Alu (India) enjoying dinner and good company in Taiwan

The recent General Committee meeting in Taiwan enabled members to learn much about the churches in Taiwan. Hosted by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, the General Committee was also treated to dinner by other CCA member churches, the Episcopal and Methodist churches, as well by the National Council of Churches in Taiwan. Theologians Dr Cheng Yang-En and Dr Huang Po Ho addressed the meeting about the Taiwan situation.

The first Christian presence in the beautiful island of Formosa, now officially known as the Republic of China, and popularly known as Taiwan, dates back to the Dutch Reformed and Spanish Roman Catholic missionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan itself dates back to the arrival of the first Presbyterian missionary in 1865 and the other member churches of CCA, the Episcopal Church in Taiwan and the Methodist Church, grew predominantly from the influx of 'mainlanders' from the People's Republic of China after World War 2, as did the Roman Catholic church.

The Aboriginal people of Taiwan have lived in Taiwan since time immemorial, part of the Austronesian language group, which stretches from Indonesia to Easter Island,

across the Pacific Ocean. Each of the eleven Aboriginal tribal groups has its own land, language, culture and tradition. The Aboriginal groups ruled themselves in relative peace, dealing with the influx of Hoklo people around 400 years ago and the influx of Hakka by intermarriage with them. Thus many of the people of modern-day Taiwan claim blood lineage from the indigenous people of Taiwan.

Taiwan was ruled by a succession of foreign governments—the Dutch, Spanish and Ching (Manchu) Dynasty from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. In 1895, at the end of the Sino-Japanese War, Taiwan

was handed to Japan 'in perpetuity' and remained so until the end of World War 2 and the arrival of the army of the Chinese Nationalist KMT on 25 October 1945.

It is not widely known that due to the brutal policies of the KMT, the Taiwanese protested peacefully. In retaliation, from 28 February 1947, KMT troops killed around 20,000 of the island's most educated elite, including doctors, lawyers and other professional and skilled community leaders. This is commemorated at the 2-28 Museum. For over forty years, people of the island were afraid to tell neighbours and friends that their loved ones had been killed, as the martial law was imposed by the KMT and only lifted in 1987.

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan courageously championed human rights during the period of KMT rule. PCT members, including Dr C.M. Kao, then General Secretary of the PCT, were imprisoned in 1979–1980 due to their advocacy of democracy and support for those struggling for human rights. President Lee, who led the country from 1992, a Christian, transformed political structures. Democracy is now firmly in place, with a considerable number of female as well as male legislators and an active parliament.

A small local church indicates the spirituality of the PCT in the face of dictator-



The Runaun Paibutbut Choir opening the National Prayer Breakfast with an Aboriginal prayer blessing Taiwan

ship during martial law times: it was the house of a famous senator and human rights lawyer. In 1980, his mother and two twin daughters were brutally stabbed to death in that house (on 28 February), widely believed to have been a warning to anyone else who wanted to stand up for human rights. The lawyer wanted to sell the house because of the traumatic memories it held for him. The PCT realised that due to traditional beliefs, nobody would want to buy a house with such 'bad luck' associated with it. So the PCT fundraised for two years and bought the house, turning it into a church, the 'Gi-Kong Church', meaning 'light of justice'. The congregation is still deeply involved in social justice. It was a great privilege for CCA President Bishop Iranaeus and Associate General Secretary for Finance Mandy Tibbey to worship there after the General Committee meeting.

Parishioners of the church include Mr Stephen Lee, a human rights lawyer who had also bravely stood up for human rights during martial law. Nowadays, he says, human rights are infinitely better in Taiwan. The main human rights issues today are questions of ensuring appropriate conduct by the military and police towards civilians and promoting the human rights of women and children.

Aboriginal people in Taiwan face many problems common to indigenous people



Executive Committee and staff, meeting in Taipei

elsewhere: the need to retain their own land, the struggle not to be seen as a 'second class citizen' but to be treated with dignity and respect, for an educational system that respects traditional Aboriginal values and ways of learning, exclusion from governance of national parks and developing local Aboriginal languages.

Aboriginal people are also facing life issues such as the existence of a nuclear plant on Orchid island, where the Yami indigenous people live. The PCT and others associated with Aboriginal people have taken up the cudgels to try to prevent renewal of the licence for the plant, which is built in a volcanic region and is thus seen by many as being potentially unsafe.

The worship life of traditional indigenous communities has become a source of inspiration for others. This was power-

fully felt during the National Prayer Breakfast in Taiwan, supported by the churches and attended by a number of CCA guests, at which indigenous people danced and sang their worship, moving, humming, singing and shouting, all to the glory of God. This indicated the beauty of their traditional culture, their strong affinity with land and life and sense of God, expressed colourfully and with great passion.

Vital social issues facing Taiwan society include the question of its political identity and future, cohesion and harmony between the Aboriginal, Hakka and 'mainland' parts of the society, democracy building, issues common to industrialised societies such as unemployment and pollution, social ills such as gambling, prostitution, drug taking, pornography, gender justice and dealing with growing demands from the younger generation for increased participation in decisions affecting their lives (such as the choice of marriage partner and job, which parents formerly determined).

The churches are working hard to meet these challenges and often do so together, through the Taiwan Council of Churches, chaired by Rev. William Lo, General Secretary of the PCT. Members of the Taiwan Council of Churches include three member churches of CCA and also the Roman Catholic Church. The difference in origins and affinities of the main churches on the island have produced contrasting political perspectives that have been a barrier to unity in the past, but this is now being overcome. Goodwill and friendship between the churches was very evident during the General Committee meeting.

—Mandy Tibbey



A rally on 15 May in Taipei calling for Taiwan to be the official name of the island

Calls for Peace

Asia responds to the Middle East conflict

Although the Middle East conflict has a long history, it cannot be denied that the latest cycle of Israeli–Palestinian violence was partly triggered by the so-called war on terror, which was popularised following the September 11 hijacking attacks in the US. The antiterrorist card has since then been globalised and overplayed, and the terrorist threat over-generalised. This has then fed into the ongoing conflicts both within and between some nations in various parts of the world.

Knowing the roots of the Middle East conflict—land and sovereignty—for both Israel and Palestine, Christians in Asia responded to the recent escalation of violence in their own ways.

Appeal for Peace

Representatives of the three monotheistic religions respecting Abraham in Hong Kong came together and issued a joint call on all people of goodwill to help foster peace in the Middle East. Affirming that peace holds a central place in each of their religious traditions, they highlighted the message of peace enshrined in the scriptures: *'Bakesh shalom v'radfeibu.'* (Psalm 34:5) Seek peace and pursue it! It is not enough for us to depend on others 'to make peace'. We must seek it out and go after it as we would pursue our own livelihood and sustenance. God will provide us with the potential for peace, we now must together plant the seeds of peace, and pursue it to the very end.

'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons and daughters of God.' (Matthew 5:9) Peacemakers fulfill God's will for the world. God's heart goes out to them and God welcomes them as God's chil-

dren. In building peace we carry out the task God has assigned to all men and women of good will.

The 'root' of the word 'Islam' in Arabic is *salama*, which is the origin of the words peace and submission, a submission to God and peace to all humanity. It is, thus, no wonder why the salutation in Islam is *'Al-salamu alaikum'* or 'peace on you'. The Prophet Mohammed ordered his fellow Muslims to salute other Muslims or non-Muslims with peace when he said, 'Peace before speech.'

Call to Repentance

The National Christian Council in Japan wrote to the Israeli Embassy in Japan on 29 March expressing sadness at the casualties of both Israelis and Palestinians during the continuous violence in the past two years. Their letter said in part, 'We deeply regret that "Christian nations" have persecuted Jewish people for many years. We especially repent that many Christians were mere onlookers during the cruel atrocities committed under the Nazi regime. However, it will lead to a similar Nazi genocide policy if the Israeli government continues to invade the Palestinian-ruled territory and take the land and water away, destroy homes and

build settlements that threaten Palestinian livelihood and kill Palestinians.' On 20–21 April, the NCCJ organised a rally to 'stop the killing and end the occupation' in support of Palestine, peace and social justice.

Prayer Vigil for Peace

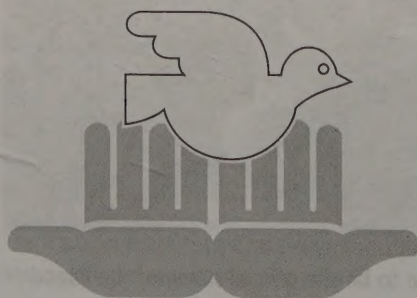
In Aotearoa–New Zealand, the Anglican Church Cathedral and Christian World Service organised a Prayer Vigil for Palestine–Israel on 19 April. The vigil started in the morning and consisted of readings, prayers and messages, repeated every hour until a service at noon. At 11 a.m. bellringers of the cathedral rang several peals in memory of Samir Ibrahim Salman, bellringer at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, who was shot by an Israeli sniper. The vigil continued until 6 p.m. when a final reading was made. People visiting the cathedral could light a candle, sign a petition and contribute to the relief fund for Palestine being run by Christian World Service. These donations will be channelled through the Action by Churches Together International.

The petition signed by visitors to the cathedral said:

'We pray for peace in the Holy Land.

'We are people called to express our concerns for peace in Israel and Palestine.

'We believe that one of the primary outcomes of negotiations in the Middle East must be a viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside the state of Israel. For a Palestinian state to be viable and for Israel to be secure, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza must end. All Israeli settlement activity in the Occupied Territories



must cease. We believe in the vision of a shared Jerusalem as the heritage, hope and home of two peoples and three religions. Jerusalem should be a shared, open city, a sign of peace and a symbol of reconciliation for the Abrahamic faiths. We call for an immediate end to the cycle of violence. We support a negotiated agreement for an Israeli–Palestinian–Arab peace based on international law. We strongly support the presence of international observers as one immediate means of discouraging further violence between Palestinians and Israelis. We urge our country's leaders to do all in their power to prepare the road for a just and durable peace.'

Dialogue as the Way to Peace

In Sydney, Australia, representatives of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities met in April and issued a joint statement calling for dialogue as the way to peace in the Middle East. The group condemned violence, vandalism and harassment on the basis of religion or race.

Affirming that Australia generally has a strong record of inter-communal harmony, the group felt that Australia may be 'an example to other societies as to how people of goodwill, from these three religions and others, can work together in the interests of the community.'

Towards Reconciliation and Peaceful Coexistence

The Human Rights Committee of the National Council of Churches in Korea issued a statement on 4 April calling for an end to violence in the occupied Palestinian territories and for peaceful coexistence of the



people in the Middle East.

'Before this terrible cycle of violence in Palestine and Israel becomes catastrophic, we strongly urge all countries, including Palestine and Israel, the US, and the allied Arab countries, to seek world peace and take active initiatives toward reconciliation and peaceful coexistence between Palestine and Israel.

'Israel's military operations and the Palestinian suicide bombings should stop immediately. We urge the two parties themselves to seek peaceful coexistence through the process of dialogue and negotiation. The extreme violence in Palestine and the killing of innocent people cannot be justified by any purpose, and we must recognise the deaths of so many innocent people as an affront to human conscience.'

Towards True Security

In order to join other Christians who have been praying for peace, the St John's Cathedral in Hong Kong organised a vigil for peace in the Middle East on 16 May.

The vigil included prayers, a hymn and readings from Scripture and was held in four half-hour sections. Among the readings was the statement from the Hong Kong Christian Council.

A group of Christian organisations (e.g. Hong Kong Christian Institute, JP Commission of the HK Catholic Diocese, JPIC Group of OFM-HK, and others) in Hong Kong issued a joint statement on 14 April. Excerpts of the statement are:

'We, as Christians, would like to share our deep concern about the current violent

situation in the Middle East and our sympathy with the families of all those who have been killed by either Israeli military attacks or by Palestinian suicide bombings. We, as part of the human community, would betray all these sacrificed lives unless we admit that violence is not the solution to end violence.

'As we look back on history, the three religious communities in the Middle East—Jews, Muslims and Christians—all share the same dangerous memories of being rejected and persecuted by other religions. We were once victims of violence at different times of history.

These dangerous memories remain dangerous if we commit the same crimes as those committed to us by our oppressors in the past.

The only way to overcome and change these dangerous memories is for us to break the cycle of violence and to act toward building peace and reconciliation.

'From a Christian perspective, true security does not rest on how we exclude and reject others. Rather, it demands us to respect and embrace other human beings as brothers and sisters, for only when we learn to coexist with others as one family, to share the world's resources with others, can we experience true security.'

Marching for Peace

In Hong Kong, a broad cross-section of representatives of various religious, ethnic and political groups participated in a march for peace in the Middle East on 14 April. The march culminated with a delegation presenting a statement to the Israeli Consulate with the following demands:

- Israel must immediately, unconditionally and completely withdraw from all the West Bank areas that they have recently occupied.
- All forms of violence and terror must immediately cease.
- The United Nations must intervene immediately.

Religion and Violence

A multifaith reflection on religion and violence contributes to the thrust of the ecumenical endeavour to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence

Religious people mostly think of their religion as a positive force and a pillar of strength for themselves and society. And rightly so. Religion is and has always been one of the sources for good and a benefit for the human community and the world. But there are also quite a number of voices questioning whether religion really plays a constructive role in the world today, arguing that religion seems rather to be part of the problem and not part of the solution for the ills of our world.

The role of religion in a world of violence is one example. When looking around in the world, religion seems to have quite a proclivity for being a handy tool to fuel conflict. Moreover, this seems increasingly the case. People wonder about the link between religion and violence.

As religious people, we need to shoulder responsibility for what is done in the name of religion, even if it is done far outside our fold, house and place of worship. We need to have a second look at what our religion is offering as a tool for fostering peace, justice and human dignity for all and not only for our own tribe. It should be an obligation for people of different religions to offer an alternative to an understanding of religion that sometimes seems all too ready to bless the guns and to justify terror, violence and war.

We have, therefore, an obligation to consider how our own religion is portrayed and how it is used. We should carefully address the whole complex interaction of religion and violence and their manifestations in our world today.

When addressing the role of religion in the world, we should abstain from lifting only the banners or slogans with the ideals of our religions. It is true that Islam is literally the religion of peace. It is true that *om shanti, shantibi* is the emphatic Vedic blessing. It is true that Jesus greeted people with the gift of peace, 'Peace be upon you.' It is true that there is an absolute emphasis on compassion and *ahimsa* in Buddhism. It is true that Judaism has given the world the word and concept *shalom*.

Religion seems to have quite a proclivity for being a handy tool to fuel conflict

It is true that religions, based on their ideals, in many cases seek to contribute to building peace. But we know they are also involved in situations of violent confrontation. There is, in the religious field, a surprising coexistence of love and violence, of affirmation of inclusiveness and practices of regrettable exclusion. We cannot run away from the effect of a religious language that excludes the other and from acts such as the crusades, the holocaust or apartheid. We cannot run away from the role of religion in the caste system. We cannot run away from the blasphemy law in Pakistan or Baruch Goldstein in Israel. We have to ask the question about the role of religion in violence. Religions are no innocent bystanders between Scylla and Charybdis. We need to reflect on the ambivalent function of religions and make an effort to clarify

the different roles of religions in relation to violence before embarking on a reflection on how religious communities can work together for the construction of peace.

Addressing the issue of violence and religion is a challenge for each one of us. It is a challenge even when you are among those of your own religion. How much more difficult would it be to do so in the presence of and with the participation of people of other faiths? I have a view of my faith, but others might have another view of it, having experienced some of its violent dimensions.

A group of scholars, educators and theologians, Jews, Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists gathered in early February to discuss and address the questions of religion and violence. In the presence of the other, each one of the participants shared with the other in openness and vulnerability that our religious traditions, in spite of their immense contributions to peace and understanding, contain a streak of violence that, if unchecked, may participate in the destruction of the other and the world. In our meeting, we reflected on how we are to understand the relationship between religion and violence.

In the Decade to Overcome Violence, it seemed to us that a multifaith reflection on religion and violence is a contribution to the thrust of this ecumenical endeavour to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence, but we must do so without shortcuts and simplistic catchphrases.

—Hans Ucko, program executive,
WCC Interreligious Relations and Dialogue

Violence in the Middle East

An Open Letter

Mr Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General
Mr Ariel Sharon, Prime Minister of Israel
Mr Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian People's Liberation Organisation

Your Excellencies:

The Christian Conference of Asia, a fellowship of 121 member councils and churches in Asia, with a membership of more than fifty-five million individuals, writes to express its grave distress at the horrifying escalation of violence in the Occupied Territories.

As Christians who revere Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus the Christ, hence the city that symbolises the advent of 'peace on earth and good will to all', we express our disgust and horror because of what is going on there that contradicts peace and good will among the races and peoples of the Middle East.

We join with our member councils and churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches in decrying the most expansive military operation in the Occupied Territories since 1982. The level of destruction of human life has been termed by the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches as 'genocidal'.

The invasion of refugee camps, killing of innocent people, reoccupation of West Bank towns and cities, withholding of access to basic facilities such as food, ambulances, access to hospitals and safe passage to bury the dead are deeply shocking.

Closure of areas such as Ramallah to press scrutiny and refusal to facilitate the presence of international peace monitors ignites fears that dastardly deeds may be being done with impunity. Surely all this is a violation of the will of God, the Creator and Lord of the universe!

We urge that the United Nations immediately implement the UN Security Council Resolutions 1397(2002) and 1402(2002), in order to effect immediate ceasefire, withdrawal of occupation troops from Palestinian cities and resumption of the peace process.

We express our solidarity with all peace-loving people of the region, both Israeli and Palestinian. It is our prayer and hope that 'justice will roll down like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream' (Amos 5:24). This means recognising the rights of the Palestinian as well as the Israeli people.

Withdrawal to the pre-1967 borders and recognition of a Palestinian state, dismantling of settlements on Palestinian land, together with acceptance of the status of the recognised leader of the Palestinian people, Yasser Arafat, will form a sound basis for peace not only in Israel and Palestine, but will benefit the whole region and the world. Achieving this will require international monitoring and supervision by the international community as a whole.

Terror begets terror; murder is a spiral which destroys democracy and all decent human values. A political solution needs to be urgently found. Every burst of gunfire, every aerial bombardment, every death of an innocent child will make the inevitable political compromises more difficult to achieve.

We hope and pray that a just peace will be found. We pray with the psalmist:

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for God will speak peace to God's people, to God's saints,
to those who turn to God in their hearts.
Surely God's salvation is at hand for those who fear God,
that glory may dwell in our land. (Psalm 85:8-9)
May we all pray and work and live for God's own glory!

Very sincerely,
Ahn Jae Woong
General Secretary
10 April 2002

What a Serious Campaign against Terrorism Entails

Holy See statement at the UN on a culture of peace, given by Archbishop Renato Martino, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, before the Plenary of the General Assembly on Item 28, Culture of Peace

Mr President:

Today, it is indeed appropriate that the General Assembly address the topic of 'The Culture of Peace'. The imperfect peace in which our world has dwelt has suddenly been shattered by violent and senseless attacks against innocent human beings. An initial reaction may come in words of war and not in a language of peace, understanding and reconciliation. Yet, institutions such as the United Nations are entrusted with the most serious responsibilities to 'maintain international peace and security and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace ... (The Charter of the United Nations, Chapter 1, Article 1, Paragraph 1)

Peace begins within hearts. It is not simply the absence of war, nor is it sought only to avoid widespread conflict, but rather it helps to direct our reasoning and thus our actions toward the good of all. It becomes a philosophy of action that makes us all responsible for the common good and obliges us to dedicate all our efforts to its cause. If, for these reasons, we are convinced that peace is a 'good in itself', we must build a culture of peace. Peace is first known, recognised, willed and loved in the heart. Then, in order to establish a culture of peace, it must be expressed and impressed on humanity, on its philosophy, its sociology, its politics and its traditions.

There are a number of definitions for the word 'culture' which my delegation believes provide us with a good starting point for our discussion today. The first speaks of culture as 'the art or practice of cultivating', while another defines culture as 'the total pattern

of human behaviour and its products embodied in thought, speech, action, and artefacts and dependent upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations through the use of tools, language, and systems of abstract thought'.

Together, both of these definitions seem to provide a foundation for a clearer understanding of culture ... and when placed into the context of today's discussion, 'a culture of peace' might be seen as 'that pattern of human behaviour which must be cultivated and transmitted to future generations'.

Once we have come to an understanding of what a culture of peace is, we begin to ponder upon ways in which to communicate that understanding and fostering its place in the minds and hearts of humanity.

Establishing a culture of peace and non-violence will necessitate a new language and new gestures for peace. In this search, we will not only educate a new generation but also will educate ourselves for peace and awaken in ourselves firm convictions and a new capacity for taking initiatives at the service of the great cause of peace.

Education for and a better understanding and realisation of peace can benefit from renewed interest in the everyday examples of simple builders of peace at all levels. Our eyes and those of the next generation need to be focused on the visions of peace which will nurture the aspiration for peace and non-violence that is an essential part of every human being.

All of this, of course, is the work that the United Nations, and the peoples of the

world have been engaged in for many years. It is an ongoing process that is hampered by too many obstacles that continue to resist the movement toward a true and lasting peace for all people.

Situations of conflict exist in today's world where a just solution may have been refused over time, by both parties involved. This has fostered feelings of frustration, hatred and temptations to vengeance to which all must remain attentive. Those who honour God must be in the first rank of those who fight against all forms of terrorism.

As mentioned by Pope John Paul II, when he met with religious leaders in Jerusalem, 'If it is authentic, devotion to God necessarily involves attention to our fellow human beings. As members of the one human family and as God's beloved children, we have duties towards one another, which, as believers, we cannot ignore.' (Pope John Paul II, Interreligious meeting at the Notre Dame Pontifical Institute, Jerusalem, 23 March 2000)

His Holiness touched upon that same idea last January, when he said, 'We all know how hard it is to settle differences between parties when ancient hatreds and serious problems which admit of no easy solution create an atmosphere of anger and exasperation. But no less dangerous for the future of peace would be the inability to confront intelligently the problems posed by a new social configuration resulting in many countries from accelerated migration and the unprecedented situation of people of different cultures and civilisations living side by side.' (Pope John Paul II, Message

for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 2001)

Acts of revenge will not cure such hatred. Reprisals, which strike indiscriminately at the innocent, continue the spiral of violence and are illusionary solutions that prevent the moral isolation of the terrorists. We must rather remove the most obvious elements that spawn the conditions for hatred and violence and which are contrary to any movement toward peace. Poverty along with other situations of marginalisation that engulf the lives of so many of the world's people, including the denial of human dignity, the lack of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, social exclusion, intolerable refugee situations, internal and external displacement and physical or psychological oppression are breeding grounds only waiting to be exploited by terrorists.

Any serious campaign against terrorism also needs to address the social, economic and political conditions that nurture the emergence of terrorism, violence and conflict.

In the midst of this current tragedy and threat to the Culture of Peace, forms of systematic terrorism should not be forgotten. In some cases they are almost institutionalised, possibly based on systems that utterly destroy the freedom and rights of

individuals 'guilty' of not bringing their thought into line with the triumphant ideology. Today these persons are unable to attract the attention and support of international public opinion and they must not be forgotten or abandoned.

In this light, the world must recognise that there is hope. Building a culture of peace is not preposterous, nor a utopian dream. It is, rather, an attainable reality, which, even though just beyond our realisation, is still a worthy and reachable goal.

Pope John Paul II has always used the idea of this search for peace as a major theme. His exhortations have been repeated especially often during the past two years, as part of the celebration of the Great Jubilee. In a homily during his visit to Jordan, His Holiness called on all mothers to be 'builders of a new civilisation of love. Love your families. Teach them the dignity of all life; teach them the ways of harmony and peace.' (Pope John Paul II, Homily at Amman Stadium, 21 March 2000)

More recently, His Holiness reminded the young people of Kazakhstan that they should 'know that you are called to be the builders of a better world. Be peacemakers, because a society solidly based on peace is a society with a future.' (Pope John Paul II, address at Eurasia University, Astana, Kazakhstan, 23 September 2001)

Finally, Mr President, I would like to conclude with the words of Pope John Paul II, spoken almost twenty years ago, which seem so appropriate for our discussion today: 'I present to you this message on the theme, Dialogue for Peace, a Challenge for our Time. I am addressing it to all those who are, on the one hand, people responsible for peace: those who preside over the destiny of peoples, international officials, politicians, and diplomats. But I am also addressing the citizens of each country. All are in fact called by the need to prepare true peace, to maintain it or to reestablish it, on solid and just foundations. Now I am deeply convinced that dialogue—true dialogue—is an essential condition for such peace. Yes, this dialogue is necessary, not only opportune. It is difficult, but it is possible, in spite of the obstacles that realism obliges us to consider. It therefore represents a true challenge, which I invite you to take up. And I do this without any other purpose than that of contributing, myself and the Holy See, to peace, by taking very much to heart the destiny of humanity, as the heir of the message of Christ and as the first one responsible for that message, which is above all a message of Peace for all men.' (Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1983)

Thank you, Mr. President.

Youth Meet on Globalisation

A seminar on globalisation, held at the Agape Centre, Prali, Italy, discussed issues of globalisation, migration, refugees, environment and human rights. Inputs came from Anotella, an economist from Italy, CCA (Rakesh Peter Dass, pictured right), the Latin American Council of Churches, the WCC and the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations. Prayer sessions helped the participants to understand and appreciate the worship of varied denominations. The final day was devoted to evaluation on what could be done to address the issue of globalisation, and the focus was on individual commitment and action plans. The participants responded proactively and committed themselves to specific action plans drawn up by themselves for implementation in their respective countries. The creative evaluation session that followed was a time for the participants to express themselves and their weeklong experience through art and painting.



Towards an Alternative to Globalisation

Is there an alternative to globalisation? The program on 'Africa-Asia Beyond Globalisation' set for 24-29 June in Bandung, Indonesia, aims to strengthen the spirit of resistance to globalisation among the people of the Asian and African regions. The program also aims to enable people from the two regions to network on such common concerns as upholding human rights, building democracy and struggling for independence.

The program's subtitle is 'The Spirit of Bandung and a New World Order', as it recalls that in 1955 leaders of newly independent Asian and African nations had met in Bandung and declared to follow an alternative path to the two ideologies of US-led capitalism and USSR-led communism. In that meeting in Bandung, Asian and African leaders shared an alternative geopolitical vision characterised by the spirit of freedom and peace. Instead of colonialism, domination, violence, racism and feudalism, there would be freedom, peace, brother/sisterhood, friendship, prosperity for all and justice.

The program is jointly sponsored by the Christian Conference of Asia, the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of YMCAs, the Asia-Pacific Alliance of YMCAs and the World Student Christian Federation Asia-Pacific Region.

Expected participants are representatives of NGOs, intellectuals, journalists, religious institutions, students and legislative bodies from some countries in Asia and Africa. Other regions will also be represented.

Three Faiths Meet

Historic meeting of Jews, Christians and Muslims reaffirms Australia's climate of tolerance and communal harmony

Representatives of the peak national organisations of Christians, Muslims and Jews met in Sydney in April for the first-ever formal three-way discussion between these groups.

The meeting, at the Great Synagogue, was an opportunity for the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) and the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) to exchange information and opinions in what proved to be a positive and harmonious manner.

Amjad Mehboob of AFIC, the Rev. John Henderson of NCCA, and Jeremy Jones of ECAJ led their respective faith representatives.

Other participants were Rabbi Raymond Apple, Sheikh Amin Hady, Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins, Sr Trish Madigan, Mr Hafez Malas, Mrs Peta Pellach, Ms Wendy Wilkie and Bishop Mar Meelis Zaia.

Participants agreed that Australia generally has a strong record of intercommunal harmony and has the potential to be an example to other societies as to how people of goodwill, from these three religions and others, can work together in the interests of the community.

The meeting took place a week after the three faith community bodies issued a joint statement calling for dialogue as the way to peace in the Middle East, and condemning violence, vandalism and harassment on the basis of religion or race.

All present took part in the process of information sharing and learning about each other in an open, warm and honest manner.

—NCCA

Mismanaged Oceans Threaten Asia-Pacific Nations

Poor management of the world's seas is destroying ecosystems and threatening the sustainability of fisheries, said international marine experts meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 13 May.

'The degradation of the environment is worsening. Many of our marine ecosystems are not functioning very well,' said Chua Thia Eng, regional program director of the

Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia.

Chua, speaking at the start of a four-day Asia-Pacific conference on marine science in Malaysia, said that poor management of coastlines in many countries was worsening the effect of rising sea levels.

Pacific island countries such as Tuvalu and Samoa might become uninhabitable in the next few decades. Some scientists believe Tuvalu could be completely submerged within twenty-two years if sea levels continue to climb.

Southeast Asia has one-third of the world's coral reefs, but more than half of these were 'at high risk' from overfishing and pollution, said Prof. Chou Loke Ming of the National University of Singapore. Indonesia and the Philippines have been forced into salvage and restoration programs, including coral transplantation and artificial reef building to protect their fishing and tourism industries, he said.

—CWM

Churches in India Demand President's Rule in Gujarat

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) jointly condemned the ongoing violence in Gujarat and appealed for the imposition of the President's Rule in the state after dismissing Narendra Modi's government.

'Even though more than 800 lives have been lost and nearly a hundred thousand people made homeless, the violence in Gujarat shows no signs of abating. We make a strong demand for imposition of President's Rule in the state immediately, as also demanded by others, so that peace and normalcy may return in Gujarat,' said Archbishop Cyril Mar Baselios, the President of the CBCI and Archbishop of Trivandrum, speaking on behalf of all the three church bodies.

Expressing their great distress at the situation in Gujarat, the leaders continued, 'Despite criticism of events in Gujarat from everywhere, including international quarters, the situation does not seem to be improving there. The church bodies appeal to the centre that it take stern action against the state government and those involved in that continual carnage.'

The President of the NCCI, Bishop Geevarghese Mar Coorilose, has expressed his serious concern over the way members of the Muslim community are being treated. 'The only way to save the current Indian democratic state is that every citizen of this nation come forward to defend other citizens who are under attack by hard core fundamentalists,' he said.

The joint statement says that the brutal attacks on the Muslim community in the various parts of Gujarat 'smack of a fascist ideology in action', which was involved in attacks earlier also on the Christian community. While making serious demands on the government, the church leaders also appealed to their own people to intensify prayers for the people of Gujarat, be they victims or perpetrators of violence.

'Behold and See Our Disgrace'

(Lamentations 5:1)

Ecumenical Bishops Forum Statement on the Philippines-US Balikatan Exercise

The Ecumenical Bishops Forum is deeply disturbed by the influx of US troops through the RP-US Balikatan exercise 02-1. Their statement:

The Macapagal-Arroyo government is courting war. By welcoming hundreds of US troops with their live ammunition and hightech weaponry, it has totally disregarded the people's rejection of US military presence. It has not learned the lessons of history as it continues to play deaf to the anguished cry of those who abhor the social ills and abuses brought by foreign military occupation of the country. We are greatly saddened by this betrayal. The government is not heeding the spirit of People

Power II. Instead, it goes about its divisive ways, pitting the people of this country against each other by forsaking the dignity and sovereignty of our nation in the guise of anti-terrorism. We strongly advise the Manila government to address the collusion among local government and military officials with the Abu Sayyaf bandits and other local terrorist groups rather than depend on the US troops to solve our internal problems.

Balikatan 02-1 clearly violates the constitution. It reflects the lack of the government's political will and trust in the capacity of the Philippine army and police to defend and secure the country. The government's enthusiastic approval and blatant all-out campaign to advocate it in public is repugnant. It is a sure sign of subservience.

We dread the violations on human rights that will escalate in the long term as a result of this dangerous experiment. At stake is the peace and justice that all of us yearn for. We fear that whatever gains we have towards achieving peace will go to naught.

Above all, we are deeply concerned by signals coming from the United States that this is a portent of graver things to come. With a draft Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement (MLSA) that is full of loopholes and in the absence of clear Terms of Reference (TOR), the presence of US armed forces in our country is a clear imposition to protect US interests here and elsewhere in the world. This we believe is the ultimate goal. Not the elimination of the Abu Sayyaf, not the new lessons of war US soldiers can teach Filipino soldiers, not the war against terrorism.

We therefore urge our people to be steadfast in denouncing this mockery of our nationhood. Our dignity and integrity as a nation are neither for sale nor are they abstract. They are as real as proven by the great men and women who shed blood and tears to ensure that we in our time shall enjoy the blessings of such heritage.

Even as we commit you and this country to God's mercy and protection, we urge you to remain vigilant. Be discerning and not be carried by emotions. It has been said, 'Do not just look at one tree, look at the whole forest.' Be constant in prayer and

remember, 'Christ has set us free; stand, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.' (Galatians 5:1).

—Bishop Gabriel A. Garol,
Spokesperson, EBF

CCA-WCC Meeting



In Taipei recently the CCA-WCC working group met, the third such meeting ever and the first since 1997. Ms Carmencita Karagdag, Dr Herman Shastri, Mr Hubert Van Beek and Mr Mathews George Chunakara represented the WCC and Mr Anthony Row (President of CCA), Rev William Lo, Dr Ahn Jae Woong and Ms Mandy Tibbey represented CCA.

The meeting was an opportunity for useful discussion on the global ecumenical picture, plans of both organisations and opportunities for greater collaboration. The importance of keeping Asian representatives of WCC in touch with CCA was highlighted and importance of conducting joint programs affirmed. One new step in collaboration was CCA's willingness to invite representatives of WCC to future CCA meetings such as General Committee.

Update

- In the last issue of 'CCA News' (March 2002) the artist of the painting on the cover, 'Peace', was identified as 'STM'. We have now learned that the artist was Salvador T. Martinez of the Philippines.
- On page 30 of the same issue, please note that the correct date for the passing of Susanta Adhikari should have been 21 February 2002.

Ecumenical Youth and Students' Week

A writers' workshop to prepare for the Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Week 2002 (APSYW) was held on 24-31 May in Taytay, Rizal, Philippines. Participants in the writing workshop were representatives from the six youth and student organisations, whose creative writing skills were shared to prepare resource materials such as articles, poems, prayers, stories and a postcard, for use by the network.

Formerly known as Asia Youth Week and conducted by the CCA Youth Desk, the program is, starting this year, a collaboration and celebration of the Ecumenical Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Network (EASY Net).

This marks an occasion of mutual sharing and joint observance by the six youth and student organisations active in the region (CCA Youth, WSCE, IMCS, IYCS, YWCA and YMCA).

Keeping committed to the tradition and spirit of the previous Asia Youth Weeks, EASY Net will celebrate the Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Week every year on the third week of October.

During this special week on 14-20 October 2002, students and youth in the Asia-Pacific region are encouraged to come together to share and learn about the life experiences in their communities and countries, to reflect on and critically study the issues affecting peoples' lives in Asia-Pacific and to seek the nature and meaning of Christian mission in our context. The week is also a time for joy and celebration as youth and students express their unity and solidarity and renew commitment to the vision which holds the promise of a transformed community.

So, this is an invitation to all students and youth in the Asia-Pacific region to hold reflective and celebratory events to mark Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Week. Seminars, workshops, dramas, drawings, paintings, music, poetry, songs, dances, worships and prayers could be used to make such events memorable. As it is an ecumenical event, it will draw all young people together—irrespective of faith or ideological commitment. To better utilise and follow up the process from the Asian Students and

Youth Gathering (ASYG) 2000 to form the Ecumenical Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Network, we strongly encourage the different student and youth groups to organise common events together. It is our hope that Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Week will inspire and challenge all to be constantly alive to the vision and hopes, the love and passion of being young people in our communities.

This year the theme of Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Week is 'Peace Be with You' (John 20:20). The world needs peace and justice, as the world is wounded, where people's lives are violated by the global war on terrorism, cross-border and religious tensions, communal violence, racial and gender discrimination, migrant's rights, poverty etc.

We need a peace movement where the students and youth are encouraged to engage in peace building through dialogue, action and reflection. We want to create justice and harmony in economy, society, culture and religion so as to become a humane and a just world.

Youth Internship

Once again, the CCA youth internship is open to applicants from member churches and church councils. The period of the CCA Youth Internship is from July 2002 to March 2003 and aims to provide a young person an opportunity for gaining experiences in the following areas: understanding the Asian ecumenical youth movement, theological and leadership formation and learning different faith contextualisation perspectives.

Specifically, this year's internship aims:

- to facilitate the publication and distribution of the Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Week 2002 materials,

- to facilitate the implementation of the South Asian Youth Empowerment for Transformation 2002,
- to facilitate the implementation of the School for Ecumenical Leadership Formation 2003,
- to work with the ecumenical youth movement in Asia, and the Ecumenical Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Network, through CCA Youth.

If interested, please contact Rakesh Peter Dass for an application form or download the form from the CCA website.

Applications will close on 30 June.

Women's Efforts in Building a Culture of Peace

Overcoming violence starts with the recognition that, indeed, ours is a violent world and women have a significant contribution towards achieving peace as a way of life. So churchwomen in the Philippines gathered on 16–19 October 2001 in Quezon City for a Consultation on Women's Response to the Decade to Overcome Violence.

The four-day consultation, held at the NCCP Ecumenical Centre, was attended by thirty-one representatives (only four were men) from the women's organisations (sixteen), member churches (eight), and regional ecumenical councils (seven) of the NCCP.

The participants resolved to ask the delegates to the 20th NCCP General Convention to adopt the Decade to Overcome Violence, formulate programs and allot a budget for it. They also strongly recommended to the women's organisations to lobby for their respective churches to adopt the Decade, and for the women's organisations themselves and the RECs to incorporate it in their programs. Among others, the consultation endeavoured to discuss globalisation, violence in the church, back-

ground of the declaration, theological basis for doing peace, and sex trafficking.

The Women's Month of March was celebrated with the aim, among others, of widely promoting and propagating further the yearly celebration of International Women's Day (IWD) among church and community women. Its celebration focus was on Violence against Women (VAW) perpetrated in the course of the US global anti-terrorist war, especially in Mindanao.

Around 400 leaders and members of the Ecumenical Women's Forum (EWF), a broad network of Christian and Muslim women's organisations, including the NCCP Women's Desk as one of the convenors, voiced a resounding 'No!' to the Balikatan 02-1 (joint US–RP military exercises) with an ecumenical liturgical celebration on 9 March 2002 at the Central United Methodist Church in Kalaw Street, Ermita, Manila.

In July in solidarity with all women whose sufferings we all share, churchwomen in the Philippines and from other parts of the world will come together in a Solidarity Mission to draw out the facts and highlight the particular plight of Filipino

women and children under the weight of growing US military presence in the country. Then they will gather for a Conference that will address the theme: 'Women's Voices to overcome Violence'. The outcome of the Solidarity Mission and Conference will be shared through a press forum and will form part of the women's contribution to the projected international ecumenical conference on 'Globalisation and Terrorism: Prospects for Peace and Security in Asia and the Challenge of the Decade to Overcome Violence'.

Jointly sponsored by the NCCP, the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia, the international ecumenical conference will be held in Manila on 23–26 September 2002. A two-day basic orientation course on women in this year's Basic Ecumenical Course (BEC) on 26–28 May will also highlight VAW as depicted in sex trafficking in the context of globalisation. A culture of peace—this is what women are cultivating as a heritage for this and the future generations. The Decade to Overcome Violence, hopefully, will lead us closer to that goal.

—Liza Lamis, NCC Philippines

On the Wings of a Dove

Women envision a safe and violence-free world. We dream of a new community and work towards its realisation. We raise our voices in Asia and call on the church:

- to affirm the ways in which women resist violence and in solidarity with each other bring healing to survivors,
- to identify their own sometimes silent complicity in the violence,
- to act out with courage to root out all forms of violence against women and children.

As Asian women, let us join in a worldwide campaign to overcome violence against women and children! Some important women's gatherings focusing on overcoming violence are:

- **Empowering Indigenous Women to Overcome Violence**, cosponsored by CCA and WCC, on 4–12 November in Thailand.

This is a program for indigenous women on reading the Bible from indigenous women's eyes, intersecting categories of racism, classism and sexism; and drawing from their faith and cultural heritage strategies of overcoming violence.

- **General Assembly of the Association of Theologically Trained Women of India**, 2–5 May in Hyderabad on the theme 'Towards a New Community: A Violence-free Society'.
- **VIIth Quadrennial Assembly of the All India Council of Christian Women**, 4–7 November in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, South India, on the theme 'Towards an Inclusive and Violence-free Community: Women Building up Communities of Peace and Justice'.
- **Women's International Solidarity Mission and Conference** on the theme 'Women's Voices to Overcome Violence', 23–30 July in the Philippines.

—Cora Tabing-Reyes

Bangladesh

The president of the Bangladesh Baptist Fellowship, **Tapan Chowdhury**, has announced that **Mr Leor Protim Sarkar** has been appointed their new General Secretary. Leor succeeds Pastor **Sushil Ch. Bose** who served in such capacity for more than fifteen years and who retired recently. The members and officers of the BBF have asked for prayers for Sushil's good health and for Leor, together with his wife Panna and daughter Prachi, as he shoulders the responsibilities of BBF general secretary.

The Church of Bangladesh elected new officers at its 4th synod meeting on 7-9 November. Elected moderator is the **Rt Rev. Michael S. Baroi**. The honorary synod secretary is **Albert A.K. Samadder**, while the honorary treasurer is **Agustin Dipok Karmokar**.

Taiwan

The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan elected **Rev. Wang Kwang Shinh** as Moderator and **Rev. Chen Yu Chuang** as vice-moderator during its 48th General Assembly meeting held on 2-5 April 2002 in Tainan. The assembly also approved the appointments of **Rev. Dr Huang Po Ho** as President of the Tainan Theological College and Seminary and **Rev. Dr Kao Wen Jin** as President of the Yusan Seminary. The theme of the Assembly was 'Spiritual Renewal and

a Life Dedicated to Serve'. A special panel was held on the topic of establishing homeland feeling and firming up self-identity. Panelists were the **Rev. Dr C.M. Kao** (former PCT General Secretary), **Rev. Dr C.S. Song** (president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches) and **Elder Yi-Hsiung Lin** (a lawyer and member of Taiwan's parliament). Dr Kao highlighted the need for respect and mutual support of all ethnic groups in Taiwan while Elder Lin emphasised the need for democracy. Dr Song stressed the importance of spirituality and the need to renew cultural uniqueness of each ethnic group. The PCT and the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) signed a partner church agreement based on mutual understanding of church mission, mutual respect for self-determination, resource sharing, personnel exchange and mutual consultation. The CCT delegation was led by its General Secretary **Rev. Dr Sint Kimhachandra** and Moderator **Dr Boonratna Boayen**. Another action of the Assembly was to reserve one-fifth of all places in GA committees and legislative bodies for women.

Korea

The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK) had a service of inauguration on 22 April for **Rev. Paik Do-Woong** as its new General Secretary. In his inaugural speech,

Rev. Paik said it is 'our responsibility to accomplish visible unity through reconciliation and to build a peace community where every person is able to experience the love of Jesus Christ'. He resolved to develop strong, cooperative, moral leadership for establishing peace and reconciliation, and to encourage dialogue and interchange among other churches for ecumenical mission and witness. Rev. Paik is a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, served local congregations for twenty years and was Associate General Secretary of the NCKK.



Paik Do-woong

Opportunity

The Church World Service in New York has announced a new program, Seminar on Trauma Awareness and Recovery (STAR), which is geared towards empowering religious leaders and caregivers to deal with stress, trauma and peacebuilding. For the next two years, once a month and for five days, a STAR seminar will be held on the campus of Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, or in a surrounding area. Created in the aftermath of September 11, the STAR program is meant to equip caregivers in addressing needs of individuals in stressful or traumatic situations. The seminar will include (a) training in trauma awareness and response, security, justice and peacebuilding, (b) an elective, interactive experience drawing on knowledge and skills of participants and facilitators and (c) an interreligious project, open to congregational leaders from all religious traditions.

In each seminar, there will be four spaces for international participants, drawn from CWS partners around the world. These will be people who are dealing with training around stress, trauma, conflict or peacebuilding. The

program is open to mid-level persons and lay people who are engaged in these areas of work. Since wars and crimes around the world involve religions, persons of various religious experiences are invited to apply. Selection of participants will be based on the following factors: experiences of the individual around issues of peacebuilding, availability of space and diversity. The cost of the seminars, meals, lodging and transportation are free.

The hope is that the chosen individuals will be able to share their experiences at the seminar and when they go back to their communities so they will continue to empower others affected by conflict and trauma. If you have names to recommend, please contact Moses Ole Sakuda, Associate Director, Mission Relationship and Witness, Church World Service, 475 Riverside Drive, Suite #700, New York, NY 10115, USA, email: Msakuda@churchworldservice.org or fax: 212-870-2223. Please include the recommended person's address, phone number and email. A suggestion of the preferred month would also be appreciated.

Metropolitan Joseph Mar Irenaeus

His Eminence Dr Mar Irenaeus Metropolitan is one of the strong pillars of the ecumenical movement in India.

He was born as P.T. Joseph in Kerala to parents who had traditionally owned property, and assisted them in looking after the family property. He attended the local school to 10th standard and then studied economics at Union Christian College, Alwye. The Union Christian College, an institution with an ecumenical foundation, provided him with ecumenical insights and experiences in his formative years. Here he and his fellow students became politically aware, and met leaders who moulded their views, both left and right.

He next decided to do theological training at the United Theological College in Bangalore. (He subsequently did post-graduate work at the Protestant Episcopal Seminary in Virginia, USA, and at Wyclif Hall, Oxford, and Augustine College, Canterbury, in the UK.) He comes from a family which produced several great leaders of the Malankara Church. From the Palakunnathu family in Maramon came Abraham Malpan who led the reformation movement in the indigenous church founded by St Thomas. Although the first four bishops of the church after the reformation also came from the same family of Mar Irenaeus, he had at first no intention to enter the ministry. However at the age of 25 he was ordained and served for some time as a parish vicar. He then spent four years as secretary to his church's Department of Mission. In 1975 his church called him to be a bishop. Although elected by the church, this required considerable



thought before accepting the position as it means a lifelong commitment of service to God, relinquishing family obligations (a bishop in the Mar Thoma Church must be celibate). In addition a bishop cannot hold personal property and receives no salary or allowances.

Bishop Joseph has been interested in the ecumenical field ever since his student days. He has been involved at the local, regional, state, national and international levels. He was an active member of SCM, president of the Kerala Council of Churches, and served with the National Council of Churches in India, including two terms as vice president and one term as president. He served as a board member and president of the Churches Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), a trustee of the Ecumenical Loan Fund of India, president of the Kerala Auxiliary of the Bible Society and

involved in the micro-credit movement, the World Council of Churches, Lambeth conferences, the Anglican Consultative Council and, of course, CCA.

His political interests continue, and he counts politicians as personal friends, who seek and are offered advice when issues arise, especially in the social field.

He is now the Suffragan Metropolitan of his church, meaning he is second in line to the Metropolitan. His diocese is Adur-Mavelikara and he lives in Adur. There are 142 parishes in his diocese and two colleges. He lives simply, working in the garden and kitchen and on a small rubber estate belonging to his church that he supervises.

The Mar Thoma Church has been a member of CCA since its beginnings, and Bishop Irenaeus has been a

delegate to general assemblies in Seoul (1985), Manila (1990) when he was asked to serve on the International Affairs Committee, Colombo (1995) and Tomohon (2000), where he was elected as a president. A humble and dignified man, he has never sought office, but when God asks him to do a job he accepts.

At the age of 70 the bishop is still an active man with no major health problems, who rises at 5 a.m. and whose staff have to run to keep up with him. He was a basketball player in his youth, and still swims, which he considers the secret of his health.

His Eminence Dr Joseph Mar Irenaeus Suffragan Metropolitan brings to his position as a president of CCA years of experience in the ecumenical movement, informed leadership and wise counsel to the organisation, and is loved by all.

—Geoff Alves



Members of the General Committee, together with CCA staff, in Taipei during the General Committee meeting in May 2002

CCA People

The General Committee is elected by the General Assembly of CCA, held every five years. It is composed of elected officers and one representative of each country represented in CCA. It has decision-making powers between assemblies. This is the first in a series introducing the members of the General Committee.



Julius Paul

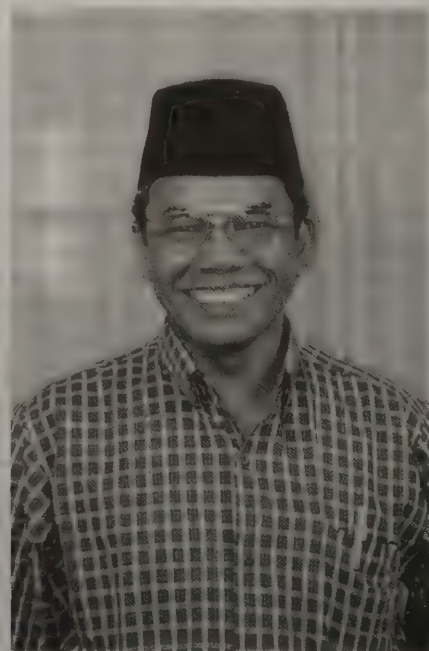
Bishop Julius Paul is bishop of the Diocese of Kuala Lumpur of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia. He is also president of the Council of Churches of Malaysia, deputy president of Seminary Theology Malaysia and a member of the Christian Federation

of Malaysia, a body that includes Roman Catholics, evangelicals and other Protestants. Julius has been part of the ecumenical movement since his student days in SCM. He has always had a proactive and positive desire for the wellbeing of the ecumenical movement in spite of its so-called 'ineffectiveness'. He believes God has a way of perfecting his strength through our weaknesses. Married with three children, he lives in Kuala Lumpur. Julius has a passion for physical activity, and when he is travelling keeps his eyes open for a gym.

Richard Daulay

Pdt Dr Richard Daulay is a minister of the Methodist Church of Indonesia, currently serving as the deputy general secretary of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia. For Richard, friendship is the most important aspect of the ecumenical movement. This means we must develop more access to each other within the churches, and also seek to develop friendship with those from other religions. He and his wife Julie have

four daughters, three at university and one in school, and he lives in Jakarta. Among his interests he lists swimming and reading, but above all friendship—keeping in touch with friends.





Israel Paulraj

Mr Israel Paulraj from Sri Lanka is the honorary treasurer of CCA. Israel is a director of the Carson Cumberbatch group of companies. He has been treasurer of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, on the standing committee of the Diocese of Colombo of the Anglican Church in Sri Lanka, an incorporated trustee of the Church of England in Ceylon, and chairman of the Ecumenical Loan Fund in Sri Lanka. He is also a member of various business and trade associations. Israel has been involved in the ecumenical movement from his youth, when there was much discussion on church union in Sri Lanka. He is concerned that many Christians still only know about their own particular church. As we live in a multi-religious society Israel feels there should not be division among Christians. He believes the ecumenical movement must play a role in bringing churches together.

Married with two children, Israel lives in Colombo and church and social welfare work consumes much of his time, to the extent that his wife has suggested he should take his mat and sleep at the church!

John Gilmore

Mr John Gilmore is an ordained minister of Churches of Christ in Australia. He is Director of Mission and Ministry with the Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania, and is also deputy chair of Christian World Service of the National Council of Churches in Australia. As realities are fundamental to the mission of the church in Australia and Australian society, John's understanding of the church is that we are *koinonia*, so therefore we must be engaged with the whole church, including in Asia. Married to Robyn and with one son, Joseph, John lives in Melbourne. He counts among his many interests gardening and house renovation. Interested in other communities he enjoys learning more about the world.



Fuailalagi Samoa Saleupolu

Ms Fuailalagi Samoa Saleupolu is the Taiwi National Resource Person—Youth of the Methodist Church of New Zealand. She is also a member of the Churches Youth Ministry Association, which includes Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian churches and is involved with her local youth group at her church in Otara, in Auckland. Lagi is passionate about young people being able to assert themselves and their identity. Her job involves working with the diverse nature of peoples in her church ('taiwi' means non-Maori—Lagi herself is of Samoan descent) and the challenge is to identify the needs of the different groups, building relationships between them and working towards finding ways of honouring the multicultural journey of the church. Lagi loves 'hanging out' with her friends and family for coffee, a movie or playing pool.

CCA to Celebrate Forty-fifth Anniversary

The Christian Conference of Asia will celebrate its forty-fifth anniversary with an international symposium on 5–9 August in Hong Kong on the theme 'New Ecumenism'.

The celebration will be a time of take stock of the life and work of the Asian ecumenical movement as well as to glean new challenges from the changing global geopolitics affecting the region. Dr Harvey Cox, professor of the Divinity School at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, will speak on

Religious Values of the Ecumenical Movement. Other speakers will be Dr Kyaw Than, former general secretary of CCA, on the 'Ecumenical Movement in the Past' and Dr Wong Wai Ching, current president of the CCA, on the 'Ecumenical Movement in the Future'. As well as the three keynote addresses, there will be three panels for sharing on new ecumenism to be participated in by representatives from the churches, civil society groups, youth and women's groups, and other religious groups.

Dams and People

A national seminar in India on 'Dams and the People' was organised by the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore, 15-17 March 2002, and attended by thirty-seven participants representing universities, NGOs, people's movements, colleges, churches, social science institutes and the media. The participants adopted a statement sent the central government, state governments, policy makers and other implementing agencies in the country. Excerpts from their statement follow:

According to official estimates more than 100 million people have been displaced due to development projects around the world over the past decade. The international dam industry itself has over the last fifty years displaced over 30 million people. It is not well known that India has one of the highest rates of development-induced displacement in the world. During the last fifty years, some 3,300 big dams have been constructed in India. Many of them have led to large-scale forced eviction of vulnerable groups. The situation of tribal people is of special concern as they constitute 40 to 50 per cent of the displaced population.

As a result of misguided policies, project-affected communities have been subject to sudden eviction, lack of information, failure to prepare rehabilitation plans, low compensation, loss of assets and livelihoods, traumatic relocation, destruction of community bonds, discrimination and impoverishment.

There are no reliable official statistics on the numbers of people displaced by large projects since independence. According to one official figure in 1994, there were about 15.5 million internally displaced people in India and the government acknowledged that some 11.5 million were awaiting rehabilitation. However, calculations based on the number of dams constructed since independence indicate that as many as 21 to 33 million people are

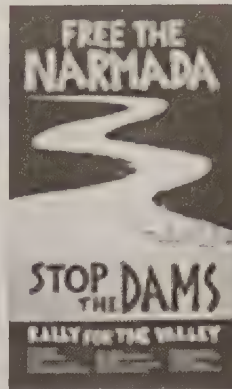
likely to have been displaced. These estimates do not include persons displaced by canals, or by the construction of colonies or other infrastructure. Neither do they include those who have been subjected to multiple displacement.

It is widely accepted that the forced displacement has had an adverse impact on the affected population. It creates a condition of homelessness, landlessness, joblessness and food insecurity as well as severe environmental imbalances and disruption of ecosystems. This poor state of affairs is due to the present pattern of development, which considers displacement as an inevitable part of development. It is time to think of alternatives to development.

Alternatives to major dams should be developed further: minor irrigation projects, check dams, tank irrigation, ground water enrichment and use, rain water harvesting, drip irrigation, contour binding structures, subsurface dykes and medium irrigation projects. In the case of hydro projects, other means based on waves or solar energy could be used.

The seminar agreed that:

- a right to information regarding projects at all the stages must be ensured, as it raises issues concerning the violation of human rights,
- the planning and implementation of dams should be in consultation with the people affected. Multiple displacement, which further marginalises the



affected population, should be avoided at all costs,

- strict monitoring of each stage of a project is essential to avoid cost and time escalations,
- women and children among the displaced families should be given special attention,
- rehabilitation should be a right of an affected population and should be provided even before the beginning of the project,
- those affected should be provided with adequate compensation for assets lost,
- the affected population should be the first beneficiaries of the project. This could be done by providing land in the command area itself, thus they can be 'project benefited people' instead of project affected people,
- as no reliable information is available regarding the numbers of displaced and project affected people, as well as details on rehabilitation, a strong and reliable database is required for policy implementation and for the use of the people concerned,
- a national policy on resettlement and rehabilitation of people displaced by dams should be formulated. A national commission on dams is suggested in this regard, comprising representatives from affected populations, NGOs, social scientists and government officials,
- all irrigation works should be legitimately authorised by ensuring accountability to the people,
- the ecological issues raised in the construction of big dams should be addressed, as the global community is now committed to sustainable development,
- the question of the transfer of technology from the developed countries, through the umbrella of the MNCs, to the developing/underdeveloped countries is also a matter of concern as it involves a transfer of culture.

—Siby Tharakan

Upholding Children's Rights and Dignity

Consultations held in the Philippines and Thailand

Children as victims of child labour and trafficking, sexual abuse, drugs and substance use, toxic waste, militarisation and other senseless violent acts are among the clear manifestations of the effects of globalisation in the Philippines.

In order to listen to the pains and hopes of children, a national consultation was held in Dasmarinas, Cavite, Philippines, on 24–26 April. Representatives of member churches of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), children's organisations and people's organisations concerned with the rights and dignity of children gathered for this meeting. About twenty-five children and twenty-five adult participants attended the consultation. Through drama, the children expressed their aspirations and suffering because of violence and war.

The meeting analysed the conditions of children, especially those living in difficult situations. The process of globalisation, liberalisation of markets and privatisation of public utilities add to the miseries of many children. They suffer greatly from the withdrawal of food, health and educational subsidies. Poverty and ignorance were considered the most important factors that result in chil-

dren being sexually exploited and trafficked. The armed intervention by the Philippine and American troops in Mindanao has also contributed to displacement and trauma experienced by many children.

This national consultation was organised by the NCCP and children's organisations, and supported by the Christian Conference of Asia—Faith Mission and Unity program area. The theme of the consultation was 'Affirming Fullness of Life and Dignity of Children'. It was a follow-up to a previous consultation on the same theme organised by the CCA and WCC in Bangkok on 9–15 November 2001.

In her opening address, Sharon Joy Rose Ruiz-Duremdes, NCCP General Secretary, emphasised that globalisation not only cre-

ates a negative impact on the national economy and to society but also adversely affects the domestic dimensions of life, especially the lives of children. Rev. Josef P. Widyatmadja, joint executive secretary for CCA Faith, Mission and Unity, focused in his address on the necessity for the churches to give greater attention to children's rights and dignity. The meeting closed with a communique calling on churches and other institutions to affirm and uphold the rights and dignity of children and to work together to protect and promote this in more effective ways. Member churches and children's organisations were also called upon to be active advocates on issues affecting children and to provide platforms to initiate sustained programs to address the problems of children.





HIV/AIDS Concerns in the Mekong Subregion

People from different sectors, professions, ideologies and faiths must join hands to enhance understanding, increase awareness and sensitivity, update knowledge and skills to combat HIV/AIDS and, especially, to care for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Our most important ministry is to change the personal and social attitudes that contribute to the spread of the virus and to the stigmatisation and rejection of those living with it.

The Situation

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has been spreading rapidly in the countries of the Mekong subregion—Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar and the People's Republic of China (Yunnan Province). The earliest cases of HIV/AIDS in these countries were found in the early 1980s. Since then the virus has been spreading at various rates in different countries.

Cambodia currently has one of the world's highest rates of HIV/AIDS infection. It is estimated that of the 11 million population, about 200,000 people live with HIV/AIDS as of last year.¹ Prostitution, which is illegal in Cambodia, is one of the main causes of HIV infection. Infected men in turn transmit the virus to their wives. Two per cent of Cambodian women who had blood tests and pregnancy checkups were found to be infected with HIV/AIDS.

In **China**, 90 per cent of HIV infection cases are related to intravenous drug use (IDU) and faulty plasma collection procedures. The virus is also rapidly spreading out among female sex workers, truck drivers and the 'mobile working population.'² The Ministry of Health estimated 600,000 cases in the year 2000. Without any proper prevention strategy, the HIV/AIDS epidemic could reach ten million people by the year 2010. According to this report, over 70 per cent of reported HIV positive cases are in Yunnan Province.

It is difficult to have a clear picture of the HIV/AIDS situation in Myanmar. The government has been falsifying the statis-

tics to hide the truth about the epidemic. However, various sources have reported that the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Myanmar is becoming one of the most serious in Asia. The pandemic is growing among intravenous drug users (IDUs). Needle sharing is widely practised and the proliferation of brothels, along with a lack of public infrastructure, has contributed to the significant increase in rates of the infection. The World Health Organisation estimated that half a million people in the country were infected with the virus in 2001. Some experts believe the actual number is much higher.³

In **Thailand**, it has been recognised from the beginning that most HIV transmissions have occurred through commercial sex and IDU. The HIV/AIDS situation in Thailand is being closely monitored. Nevertheless, the following information was obtained in 2001:

- 984,000 people (951,000 adults and 33,000 children) have been infected with HIV since the epidemic began.
- 289,000 of these people have subsequently died of AIDS.
- 695,000 people are currently living with HIV/AIDS, and each year, up to the end of 2006, over 50,000 Thais will die from AIDS-related causes, over 90 per cent affecting people aged 20–44.⁴

In **Vietnam**, about 60 per cent of HIV cases were among IDUs in the cities of south and central Vietnam. Commercial sex workers, especially in the Mekong delta and in the border provinces with Cambodia, are most likely to contract the disease. Official figures showed that around 41,030 people

were tested positive for HIV in November 2001. As of the end of September 2001, some 6,138 people were known to have AIDS while 3,372 had died from the disease since the first HIV case was found in 1990.⁵

Although **Laos** has so far not shown a high rate of HIV infection when compared with its neighbouring countries—Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam—the epidemic remains a serious threat. Increasing urbanisation and population mobility, coupled with rising rates of drug abuse and a commercial sex industry, could increase the infection rates. According to one report, the virus is moving along heroin trafficking routes from the Golden Triangle region.⁶

Causes

Why are people infected? What causes the infection? I would like to talk about the three major factors that contribute to the pandemic—economic difficulty, social alienation and national political and development bias. Let us look back over the past twenty years. One can see clearly that the majority of people living with HIV/AIDS are those caught in the widening and vicious cycle of **poverty**: those in poor living conditions, faced with a lack of access to health facilities. The risk factor is now much higher for women and children. It is an issue of social justice, an issue of who gets what of the available resources.⁷ People's health is intimately related to their income, education, job opportunities and opportunities to access social services.



Secondly, **ignorance, social norms and attitudes** have further aggravated the situation. There are also numerous cultural and religious barriers that impede awareness of HIV/AIDS that have often fostered denial of the issue.

Today it is clear that the HIV/AIDS issue is not simply a physical and health issue but the sum of multiple dimensions that need to be understood in local, national and global contexts. The HIV/AIDS situation is often related to a national **development policy**. Some governments in the Mekong subregion fear to recognise, accept or admit the existence of AIDS as they believe it would be detrimental to tourism, foreign investment, national revenue or the country's reputation.

In addition, HIV-positive people and those living with AIDS have been marginalised in relation to the fundamental issues of national sustainable development. HIV-infected people and those living with AIDS are isolated when their infection is known and deprived of the basic rights and opportunities enjoyed by the rest of the population. Worse, they are discriminated against, stigmatised and demoralised.

Response

Considering the seriousness and urgency of the HIV/AIDS problem confronting the countries in the Mekong subregion, governments, with the support of international organisations (UNAIDS, WHO, UNICEF etc.), the governments of developed countries and non-profit organisations have announced a high priority on HIV/AIDS prevention, control and care. In Vietnam, the government is spending about \$4 million a year to fight AIDS—to buy test kits, to ensure safe blood transfusions and to raise public awareness.⁸

In Cambodia a National AIDS Authority (NAA) was set up to strengthen policies and consolidate structures in that country. The authority also functions to raise public awareness and educate local people, and launched the 100 per cent condom use program. Prime Minister Hun Sen, in a speech to the first national conference on AIDS in March 1999, said, 'Cambodia's AIDS epidemic is killing 22 people a day and is more

serious than the country's long civil war.' He emphasised that 'no one institution or ministry should remain calm concerning the fight against AIDS. Every institution or ministry should know how to communicate educational messages to the people. This way we can reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS.' Cambodia has drafted a National Strategic Framework for a Comprehensive and Multisectoral Response to HIV/AIDS 2001–2005. The government has asked related departments to increase respect for the rights and status of women and girls, as well as to encourage men and boys to engage in safer sexual behavior.⁹

In Laos, a survey of the National Committee for the Control of AIDS, a committee that operates under the Ministry of Health of Al PDR, found high levels of condom use in commercial sex transactions and among high-risk groups of clients—truck drivers, soldiers and police.

Thailand was the first country in Asia to document the HIV epidemic among intravenous drug users and female sex workers (FSW) and their clients. After a brief period of denial, the government organised a national program, supervised from the highest levels of government, to respond to the HIV epidemic. It now has a very comprehensive HIV sentinel surveillance (HSS) system that has provided reliable information on HIV trends in selected sentinel populations throughout the country. Its major efforts focused on reducing the number of males visiting FSW and promoting condom use in all commercial and casual sexual interactions, from almost 25 per cent to roughly 10 per cent at present.¹⁰

The Manila Manifesto recommends solutions, in multi-partnership, to:

- build a sustainable regional network for exchange and collaboration,
- implement the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- increase the allocation of funds in national and local budgets,
- focus attention on vulnerability, risk and harm reduction relating to HIV/AIDS,
- undertake medical research focusing on cost effectiveness in medical manage-

ment and laboratory testing,

- develop a strategy for the sustainable provision of appropriate treatments and social support for all people infected with HIV.¹¹

The above solutions were strongly endorsed at the 5th International AIDS Congress (Malaysia, 1998) and at the 6th International Congress (Melbourne, Australia, 2000). The latest International Conference on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in December 2001 emphasised the participation of local communities and the association of HIV positive people and those living with AIDS as one of the most urgent strategies to help get the situation under control.

At the 7th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Leaders Summit in Brunei in 2001, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said during a special session on HIV/AIDS that the most significant strategy in Thailand's AIDS prevention program was its policy of 100 per cent condom use in the sex establishment. The policy, adopted in 1991, 'prevents customers from purchasing sexual services unless they use a condom'. As a result, the incident of STDs dropped from more than 400,000 cases per year before 1991 to less than 14,000 cases per year since 2000.¹²

The religious representatives of the Consultation on AIDS organised by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) in Chiang Mai in November 2001 identified concrete actions for improving implementation. It is recognised that effective implementation requires stronger and more systematic links among the three pillars on which the concept of 'fullness of life for all' is built—socioeconomic, political and spiritual development.

As HIV/AIDS is an ongoing crisis, the consultation called for a sustained and sustainable response at multisectoral and multifairh levels. The participants of the consultation called on the governments of Asia:

- to affirm the human rights and dignity of all people, including those living with HIV/AIDS, especially women and children,
- to legislate against discrimination and



stigmatisation by ensuring the basic rights of people with HIV/AIDS and their families to adequate health care, education and employment,

- to allocate adequate resources and provide programs that serve to decrease the incidence and impact of HIV/AIDS in the region.

The church at all levels—international, regional, national and local—has an important role to play in:

- challenging the negative, judgmental attitudes that still exist towards people with HIV/AIDS,
- decreasing fear and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS,
- providing accurate information about HIV/AIDS, including prevention information, and information about HIV services that may assist PLWHA (people living with HIV/AIDS),
- encouraging equal participation of PLWHA in planning and delivering HIV/AIDS programs and services,
- providing practical and pastoral support for people living with HIV/AIDS and their families, especially women and children,
- advocating for appropriate legislation and policies that address the needs and rights of PLWHA, which include access to treatment and medicine and respect for the human rights of PLWHA,
- engaging in prayerful dialogue and networking with other churches, faith communities and secular organisations in order to encourage each other in the ongoing struggle to meet the challenge of HIV/AIDS.

Risks and Challenges

While there has been a greater recognition of the importance of social dimensions and community involvement, the HIV/AIDS issues have yet to be given adequate attention in national policies and strategies in the Mekong subregion. There are some specific realities and concerns that need to be addressed.

- We have to realise that there are social, economic and political disparities among countries in the Mekong sub-region. While Thailand and, just recently,

Cambodia are ruled by a democratic constitutional monarchy, the rest of the countries are ruled by a centrally planned system, where NGOs and the private sector have not been able to participate in national development plans. The thoughts, knowledge, experiences, skills and constructive initiatives of the private sector have yet to be fully included.

- Budgeting for social welfare has been treated as less important than for other causes by most governments in the region. Massive amounts of financial and natural resources are being used for national security and militarism, and economic infrastructure development rather than social welfare. HIV/AIDS intervention programs in the subregion have suffered even more following the economic crisis in Asia after 1997. The success or failure of HIV/AIDS-related programs are built around the support received from international donors and the private sector. Thailand has launched a nationwide, people-friendly health program of THB30.00 per one hospital visit, but has excluded HIV/AIDS in the program.
- There is still a disparity and a lack of corporate partnership between and among government units, NGOs, religious communities, businesses, local communities and associations of people living with HIV/AIDS. We need to seek ways to strengthen and cooperate with each other.

Thailand's well-publicised success in curbing an epidemic fanned by rampant prostitution (heterosexual) activities has brought to light other routes of transmission against which the HIV prevention programs have been far less successful. HIV continues to spread virtually unchecked through the sharing of drug-injecting equipment and through unprotected sex between (homosexual) men.¹³

Since the first case of AIDS found in Thailand in the early 1990s, authorities have turned to religious and other non-governmental organisations for help in caring for the growing number of infected people. The sustained activities by community-based

organisations, religious communities, NGOs and governmental units, both independently and in cooperation with one another, have taught communities in the wider world how to come together on the same platform in love, understanding, cooperation, mutual trust, healing and compassion, leading to a substantial success in the reduction of the epidemic.

To conclude, I would like to say that the fight against HIV/AIDS needs a comprehensive perspective, strategy and approach. This incurable disease calls for strong political will, economic/financial support and sociocultural commitment from governments, civil organisations, religious communities, community groups and the association of the people living with HIV/AIDS to ensure that HIV/AIDS and its multifaceted problems are recognised and critically addressed. Since there is no drug or vaccine available at present to permanently destroy the HIV virus, the 'community' is the main key towards dealing with it.

—Prawate Khid-arn

(This article comes from a paper presented by Dr Prawate Khid-arn to the 'Cross Border Strategy Partners' Consultation', organised by Tearfunds UK in cooperation with World Concern, on 11–12 April 2002, in Chiang Rai, Thailand.)

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Looking Back

Asian Christian Service: A significant chapter in CCA history through the eyes of participants

Asian Christian Service (ACS) was created during the Vietnam War as a joint program of the then East Asia Christian Conference (EACC, now CCA) and the WCC. Ms Ruth Cadwallader, who visited CCA recently, vividly recalled her service as Information Secretary of the East Asia Christian Conference from 1968–72 as a blessed time of excitement at new perspectives and being on the frontiers of Christian mission. ‘ACS was an incredibly ambitious, risky and sacrificial accompanying of the peoples of Indochina through the Vietnam War. This model of solidarity “spoke” in a new way of the love of Christ in the midst of war. It was probably the first time the Asian churches had got together to provide services on such a scale and to provide them together.’

Another recent CCA visitor, Mr Sam Isaac, Director of ACS in Laos in 1968–74 (and later Deputy Director of CICARWS, the aid and development arm of the WCC), describes the program this way: ‘ACS began in Vietnam around 1966–1967 and provided assistance to refugees during the Vietnam War. We worked with teams of agriculturists, social workers, nurses and doctors and diagnosed and treated tens of

thousands of people with hardly any facilities. We didn’t have much money, but a powerful sense of wanting to assist this part of Asia which was going through what has often been described as the worst historic war situation in modern Asia. In terms of the numbers of bombs dropped, the Vietnam War competed in intensity with World War 2 in Asia. The superpowers were flexing their muscles and the people of Asia suffered.

‘I feel sometimes that I am seeing Christ dying in Laos’

‘ACS condemned the war and did not take sides. Our presence was a witness of God’s love and care for the suffering, on behalf of the Asian churches. The program was conducted together with the WCC, which mainly took care of funding, but the real work on the ground was done by the Asian churches. We built respectful relationships with all sides of the conflict, in order to be able to do our work.

‘Our methodology in the field differed from many other agencies: for instance we did not carry radios with us. So we couldn’t call for helicopters to get us out of difficult situations. When the people moved, we moved with them, walking. When a village was attacked, our people would be in the basement shelter with the local people. Refugees and internally displaced people were made so not only because of the war, but because of the deliberate policy of uprooting them and moving them to areas controlled by the government, so that the government could say that it controlled the people.

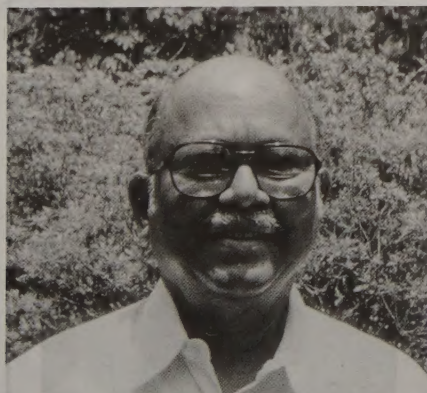
‘As the Director of the program, I had the option of living in Bangkok, but my wife



Prema was very firm, and said, “We can’t expect others to work where we are not prepared to go.” So we took our two children, aged 2½ and 4½, to Laos and lived in Vientiane 1968–74, where the CIA was conducting a covert war.

‘ACS staff came from all over the region—we had a Japanese field Director for Vietnam, Masiachi Yamashita, a Filipino Field Director for Laos, Rev. Jorge Quismundo, and personnel from all over the region. We had about 170 people in the field, including Vietnamese people.

‘I remember Ngan Tran Thi, a Vietnamese woman with degrees from France and the US in chemistry and a PhD in atomic physics from the US. She decided to return to Vietnam to help her people and walked into our office one day, wanting to help. She became one of our most competent and committed program officers, at one with people at the poorest levels. Although she was from a privileged family, she never showed herself to be “above” others in any way. I also remember Lois Bartram from Australia, who nursed the TB patients with



Sam Isaac





much love and commitment. I had to instruct her to keep her nose away from their coughing. She was fearless. Once, after a particularly terrifying time in Ban Thalot, when our staff were very shaken, I took them for five days' break to recover, and asked whether they would be willing to return to that epicentre of bombs, blood and guts, of people fleeing, people with severed limbs. Lois was willing to go back.

'Mr Bau, a Roman Catholic Vietnamese person, became another of our senior staff. He worked with a Catholic Youth Workers group and did things others were afraid to do. He cared for the families of prisoners of conscience. Another, Doug Cross, also cared for people released from prison. This was not popular and we took great risks in assisting not only refugees but others who had suffered trauma because of their position on the war, who wanted to be a third force, neutral, for example.'

Signs of Christian Presence, the occasional magazine of ACS, edited and partly



Ruth Cadwallader

written by Ruth Cadwallader as Information Secretary of EACC, still makes striking reading thirty years later. As well as providing for immediate medical needs, ACS built hope for the future based on sustainable development. This can clearly be seen in the ACS development work with fishing and weaving cooperatives and in agricultural training.

Photographs, taken by Ruth and ACS staff movingly depict the humanity and energy of the people of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as they struggled to take control over their lives. Stories and photographs show their own efforts to heal and rebuild their countries for a new day.

In November 1975, at the end of the war, Dr Yap Kim Hao, then General Secretary, led a delegation to Hanoi, accompanied by Sam Isaac (then Secretary for Interchurch Aid and ACS Director), Frans Tumiwa (ACS Field Director in Laos) and two others. They were treated as the official guests of the Vietnam Committee for the Defence of World Peace (Vietpeace).

He reflects in his history of the CCA that 'the appeal repeatedly received by the team was to provide assistance for the healing of wounds of war, consolidating peace and independence in the region. Contacts were made for the first time with the General Secretary of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam based in Hanoi. In Laos, public health, community development and education were the three areas of CCA involvement ... in Cambodia a sociomedical program for both preventative and curative health care was started.'

The ACS offices in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam spearheaded the work, with national committees being formed in each country to fully involve local people. The churches of the region, such as the Evangelical Church of Vietnam and the Laos Evangelical church, as well as the Roman Catholic church, YMCA and Buddhist Youth for Social Service were all partners of ACS in serving the people of Indochina through the war years. What a strong foundation for the continuing relationship of CCA with the people, churches and other religious communities of Indochina in the years since that time!



Ms Corrie Tilaar, formerly head nurse at a Jakarta hospital, and Ms Efigenia Fernandez, community development specialist from Central Philippine University, Iloilo, sailing down the Mekong in a boat with a number of Laotian social workers to serve twelve villages with medical and development assistance. Typical of the simple life style of ACS staff and also the strong involvement of women in ACS, this ACS team treated 40,000 patients over a one-year period between 1971-72, distributed milk supplied by the European churches through the WCC, promoted livestock raising with pigs, chickens ducks and geese distribution, vegetable raising, provided widows with nylon thread for their fishing nets and worked with local women to establish a weaving cooperative.





Laos—Three Not Yet Dead

Pakse, Laos, 1971

The ribbons of white vapour streak
across the deeply blue sky
High—and are gone in a second.

Below—silent Laotian people wait
In huddled rows, sitting in the grass.
—their lives expended in poverty.

Rare is the opportunity they have
to be cared for by the mobile health care team—
The medical team that came to Pakse in Laos.

Yesterday—as we arrived, sombre children
Met us at the village gate with the news:
Somboon had died. He was just six years old.

Malaria had claimed him—
that disease no-one should die of these days.
'Somboon'—the name means robust health and life!

Today, with the nurses, we are called to a fragile house
we climb the bamboo ladder to the living room
to watch a baby die.

We see its waxen face tremble
and then silently grow still.

The nurse with her little black bag is helpless.

We mourn with the young parents, their first child.
Lovingly they wrap the stiffening figure
in the homespun blanket.

We walk with them to the crematorium at the pagoda,
Amidst the chiming of the temple bells,
wafted by the breeze.

we join the crowd at the crematorium
and silently circle it three times.
No tears are allowed to fall on that small bundle
as it is laid upon the wooden bier—

To insure the spirits of death
that we have willingly released
this precious little soul from earth.
A ritual of threads encircle the crowd
The wood is lit and flames consume the lifeless body.

Laos—
Another child—once a joy, a future, a blessing is gone.
This child is one of those thousands
who die before they are five years old—
from diseases no-one needs to die of.

'Three not yet dead'
The refrain I hear in Laos when I ask:

'How many children do you have?'
Again and again—'Not yet dead'—
Eight pregnancies—five miscarriages or tragic death.
'Three not yet dead.'

Women of forty, old already,
their beautiful bronze faces worn.
With cherished children,
whose pot bellies are full of worms—
Parasites, diarrhoea that kills.
Respiratory ailments and malaria—
the scourge of Laos.
What? Western people say—
'People don't die of malaria any more.'

The land of a thousand elephants,
of majestic mountains;
of festivals.
of delightful, beautiful, creative people
of ancient arts and temples.

Laos.
A casualty of American intervention,
just after the French colonisation.
The cry 'Interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail!'

The ribbon of white vapour streaks
across the sky.
It is the US bombers who left the base at Ubol
on a mission to bomb the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Young, eager American youth
technically trained pilots
trying for a hundred missions.
Into the blue sky—push the button, release
the havoc
then turn to go 'home' to the base.

But drop the rest—for fun anywhere—in Pakse!
No anti-aircraft here in Pakse to worry about.

Home—the base in Ubol—bathe, eat a steak
and settle down for a movie—duty done!
Flag draped and patriotic.

* * *

Below the silent rows of Laotians
Wait for milk powder, for burger wheat—
when they need rice—
Wait for terror and death.

The silver beauty of the plane,
American technology war—
clean, safe and magnificent.
The sound of thunder disrupts—
the silent crowd on the hill.
For fifteen minutes the earth trembles
as the bombs fall on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

The sacks of bulger wheat,
the cases of 'Slim';
the milk powder—
All bear the words:
'A gift from the American people: Not to be sold!'

The bombs—are they not also a gift?

—Ruth Cadwallader

